

IS IT POSSIBLE TO RECOGNIZE THE ANTICHRIST?

Archbishop Averky (Taushev)

From the second chapter of St. Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians it is clear that the teaching about the [Antichrist](#) enters into the content of the earliest apostolic evangelization. After giving a description of the Antichrist in the third and fourth verses of that chapter, the holy Apostle writes further to the Thessalonians.

"Do you not remember that when I was still with you, I told you this?" (1 Thess. 5:5)

One cannot help considering it noteworthy that in the short period that he spent in Thessalonika that holy Apostle Paul not only did not pass over the teaching on the Antichrist in silence, as something of secondary nature and not very important, but rather considered it necessary to expound this teaching in complete detail. And in this, his second epistle, he merely repeats what he had earlier said about the Antichrist with his own mouth.

But why is it so important to know this teaching?

Because, as the Holy Fathers warn us beforehand, he who ignores this teaching, considering it unimportant and not essential in Christianity, will not recognize the Antichrist and will worship him.

St. Ignatii (Brianchaninov)

This is what [Bishop Ignatii \(Brianchaninov\)](#), who collected into one place everything said about Antichrist by the ancient Holy Fathers, says about it: [quotes from Vol. IV, p. 297]

"Antichrist will call himself a preacher and restorer of true knowledge of God: those who do not understand Christianity will see in him a representative and champion of true religion and will join themselves to him. Antichrist will appear to be gentle, merciful, full of love and of all virtues: he will be recognized as such and obeyed on account of his most exalted virtues by those who recognize fallen human nature as the truth... Antichrist will offer to mankind the organization of the highest earthly well-being and prosperity, he will offer honors, wealth, majesty, and bodily comforts and pleasures: those who seek earthly things will accept the Antichrist and call him their master.

Antichrist will reveal before mankind a shameful display of striking miracles similar to the cunning presentation of the theater... he will instill fear by the terrors and

wonders of his miracles, and by them satisfy vanity and human pride, he will satisfy carnal sophistry and superstition, and will confuse human learning: all men who are guided by the light of their fallen nature and who are foreign to guidance by the Light of God will be attracted to obey the deceiver.”

The Antichrist will be accepted with excitement by apostates from Christianity, but is deserving of deep attention and mourning, as the Holy Fathers note, that the chosen themselves will be uncertain about the person of the Antichrist, so skillfully will he be able to conceal from external observation the Satanic evil roots in him.

“The Antichrist’s opponents will be considered trouble-makers and enemies of the general welfare and good order, they will be subjected to both concealed and open persecution, torture, and execution.”

All who refuse to worship the Antichrist will fall into the most painful and difficult position:

“their small number will seem insignificant before all mankind, and their opinion will be thought especially feeble, subject to general contempt, hatred slander, and oppression; violent death will be their lot.”

Pious reader: Do you not find that the picture described above to some extent reminds one of what is already going on in the world?

Yes! But where is the Antichrist? Has he come already?

We do not see yet Antichrist himself, but his spirit obviously is settling in and already beginning to rule in the world. A large number of forerunners of Antichrist are preparing with tremendous energy for his arrival, his triumph, and his enthronement among mankind. Of course, a very long and considered preparation is necessary for the Antichrist to be able to be accepted amongst Christian people. It has been and is being conducted from the very times of the Apostles with every greater intensity.

Thus, even the Apostle [St. John the Theologian](#) wrote in his First General Epistle:

“Every spirit which does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God: but that is the spirit of Antichrist, of which you have heard that it should come, and even now it is already in the world” (1 John 4:3).

and

“Who is a liar but he that denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is Antichrist, that denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22),

and finally,

“As you have heard that Antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists” (1 John 2:18).

The learned commentator on the Holy Scripture, Bishop Michael, remarks that in the Greek original the name “Antichrist” has the definite article, which completely distinguishes this name as that of a well-known, definite person, while the other “antichrists” do not have a definite article and, consequently, as being “many,” are distinguished from him. These “many antichrists” are only the forerunners of that Antichrist who will appear before Christ’s second Coming and the end of the world: they are, as it were, “reflections” of their “Prototype”—the individual Antichrist who is to come.

They bear the spirit of Antichrist, and it is their task to lay the proper groundwork for the advent of Antichrist and to create propitious circumstances for his appearance in the world.

These “forerunners” of the Antichrist also direct that world-wide process which the Apostle St. Paul called

“apostasy” (II Thess. 2:3).

The essence of this process is Christian mankind’s ever greater departure from the genuine, uncorrupted teaching of the Gospel and the replacement of the Gospel commands with other ideals. The destructive nature of these ideals proposed to mankind by the Antichrist’s forerunners is that they sometimes seem acceptable for Christians, compatible with Christianity, while in reality they are profoundly opposed to it; they gratify human passions and lusts and confirm mankind’s fallen nature in its fallen state.

Can one trace this process of “apostasy” in history and in life?

One both can and should! One should, in order to save oneself and one’s neighbor from being attracted into this process, draw back from it, save oneself from being infected by the spirit of Antichrist which more and more is taking over the world.

The devil, of course, could not reconcile himself to the appearance of Christianity in the world, and so from the times of the Apostles we see the “spirit of Antichrist” at work in Christian people.

The first “forerunners of Antichrist” were Simon Magus, Cerinthus, and the Nicolaitians, with whom the Holy Apostles had to fight. Then came the Gnostics and a whole crowd of every possible sort of heretic with which the Holy Fathers and teachers of the Church had to fight

over the course of several centuries. In the first ten centuries of the Christian era the spirit of genuine faith and piety was, however, still strong enough in Christians that it enjoyed every time a brilliant victory over the “spirit of Antichrist”... and the Church of Christ, despite all the heavy trials it endured, was triumphant over its enemies.

Rise and fall of Simon Magus from the Church of San Pietro in Banchi, in Siena, Italy

But then by the middle of the eleventh century the “spirit of Antichrist” had so firmly taken root in the West that it was able to completely tear away a whole half of Christendom from union with the Universal Church. The result of this was “Papism” with its many and varied departures from genuine Christian teaching on faith and piety—with its newly conceived dogmas, defective morality, indulgences, the “sacred inquisition”, and similar perversions.

This was the first decisive victory of the “forerunners of Antichrist”.

Others soon followed it.

At the end of the middle ages, to totally root out the remnants of Christianity, the same “spirit of Antichrist” conceived in the bosom of “Papism”, which had torn itself away from the true Orthodox Faith, movements which were completely opposed to Christianity—unrestrained free thought, “humanism”, which places man himself in the place of God, and ... finally ... “atheism” or total godlessness. It was not without the strong influence of those movements that there occurred in the 16th century a schism within the Papal church organization itself, becoming known as “Protestantism”, which supposedly undertook to reform the Church, but which in reality went further on the way of “apostasy” and denied the very essence of the Church. Protestantism in turn began more and more to break up into fragments, “sects”—many of which at the present time have departed so far from Christianity that they deny its most important dogmas and even faith in the Divinity of the Founder of Christianity, the Lord Jesus Christ. This process by which the bigoted and ridiculous new sects are constantly arising has not stopped even now. It is extremely characteristic how clearly the “spirit of Antichrist” is manifested in all these sects.

The majority, if not all, of them talk a lot about the Second Coming of Christ and await him with special impatience and excitement (i.e., [Adventists](#)), but they are silent about the advent of the Antichrist which will precede it, or else they affirm that the Antichrist already exists in the person of the Pope of Rome. Typical in this regard was the conference held in Evanston, organized by Protestants and sectarians and conducted under the device: “Christ—The Hope of the World”. Much, very much was said at this conference about the “Second Coming of Christ” and about the blessings which it would bring to men on earth (!?), but there was total

silence about the Antichrist! Does this not naturally lead one to the thought that Protestants and sectarians are gradually being prepared by their leaders to accept the Antichrist when he appears as Christ Himself?

At the same time the clearly antichristian teachings of materialism, socialism, and Marxism-communism are appearing and being propagandized in the West, and social and political organizations with secret worship of Satan are spreading their nets ever wider, acting just as the Antichrist himself will act, “with diabolical craftiness and hypocrisy” (as Bishop Ignatii puts it). The heads of these organizations, these truly “foxes in heart and wolves in soul” (as St. Nilus the Myrrh-gusher of Mt. Athos said) are gradually taking control through out the whole world not only of public and political life, but also of people’s religious life. This is all directed to one goal—the preparation of conditions propitious for humanity’s accepting the Antichrist and worshipping him as its king and god.

The chief hindrance on the way to the attaining of this goal was Orthodox Russia, the only powerful support of the true Orthodox Christian faith in the world with its

*Royal Martyr Nicholas II—he who restrained the
mystery of iniquity*

Emperor, the sovereign defender and protector of the whole Orthodox Church. In the course of two centuries the “forerunners” of the Antichrist worked systematically and stubbornly to transform the Russian Orthodox Empire into the atheist Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

When this was achieved, a new effort was undertaken with the aim of destroying the Orthodox Church itself, working simultaneously in two directions: by means of horrible, unheard of persecutions, all but surpassing the persecutions of the first centuries of Christianity; and by means of dissolution from within, with the help of Living Church ideas, renovationism, and the planting of all sorts of free-thinking modernist tendencies in the spirit of Protestantism. In the end, in most Orthodox countries which survived devastation, the remnants of the local Churches were made into sorry tools of a power at war with God.

Bountiful fruit, however, had been gathered by the “spirit of Antichrist” in other Orthodox churches too, which remained free. They are strongly infected by the poison of free-thinking liberalism and modernism which is leading them to merger with Protestantism. Thank God, there is still a remnant in them which has not bowed the knee before the “spirit of Antichrist” which is ever more and more raising its head! Our Russian Church Abroad is still remaining firm also, although the followers of the approaching Antichrist have created a destructive schism in it, and now they are trying to destroy it completely, wipe it off the face of the earth, using for this all possible means, the chief of which is lying and slander, the natural weapons of the father of lies and slander from the beginning, the devil.

The spectacle in the world is in general quite without cheer, and would be a cause to get discouraged and fall into despair if we did not know that “it is thus written” in the Word of God and all of this must be so.

What should we do and how should we react?

“Apostasy is permitted by God”,

as one of the great instructors in the spiritual life of our time Bishop Ignatii (Brianchaninov) teaches us,

“do not attempt to stop it with your powerless hand. Flee from it yourself, protect yourself from it; that is enough for you to do. Learn to know the spirit of the age, study it, so whenever possible you will be able to avoid its influence ... Only God’s special mercy is able to stop this all-destroying moral epidemic, to stop it for a while, because it is necessary that everything foretold by the Scriptures happen.

Judging by the spirit of the times and the intellectual ferment one must suppose that the building of the Church, which has been shaking for some time, will fall quickly and horribly. There is no one to stop and oppose it. The measures undertaken to support it are borrowed and hasten its fall, rather than stopping it. There is no one who can be expected to restore Christianity!

The vessels of the Holy Spirit have finally dried up everywhere, even in the monasteries, those treasures of piety and grace ... The salt has lost its savor. In the chief pastors of the Church there remains only a weak, dim, inconsistent and incorrect understanding according to the “letter” which kills the spiritual life in Christian society and destroys Christianity, which is an action, not a letter.

It is distressing to see to whom the sheep of Christ have been entrusted, to whom their direction and salvation have been committed. But this has been permitted by God ... God’s merciful patience delays and postpones the decisive disintegration for the small remnant of those being saved, while those who are decaying or have decayed attain the fullness of their corruption. Those who are being saved must understand this and make use of the time given them for salvation. May the merciful Lord shield the remnant of those who believe in Him! But, this remnant is meager and is becoming more and more so...

“Let him who is being saved save his soul,” [Vol. IV and the Patericon]

says the Spirit of God to remnant Christians.

Since the time when Bishop Ignatii wrote this, the situation in the world has grown worse, not better. “Since the Antichrist will have as his main task the drawing away of everyone from Christ,” says the other great spirit-filled preceptor of our time, [Bishop Theophan the Recluse](#),

“he will not appear as long as royal authority remains in force. It will not allow him to develop, it will hinder his acting in his own spirit. This, then, is the “one who holds back” (II Thess. 2:7). But when royal authority falls, and the people everywhere institute self-government (republics, democracies), then there will be room for the Antichrist to act. It will not be hard for Satan to prepare voices in favor of renouncing Christ, as experience showed during the French revolution. There will be no one to pronounce an authoritative veto. And so when such regimes, suitable for disclosing the Antichrist’s aspirations are instituted everywhere, then the Antichrist will appear. [Commentary on II Thess. 2:6, page 504]

What Bishop Theophan predicted has happened: the Antichrist’s “forerunners” have done their job—the “spirit of Antichrist” is installed everywhere, having everywhere established “regimes suitable for disclosing the Antichrist’s aspirations”. Remembering Bishop Ignatii’s words that

“the Antichrist will be logical, just, and the natural result of the general moral and spiritual direction of mankind”,

we leave it to the reader attentive to surrounding life to draw his own conclusions from what has been said above, while, on our part, we can only repeat:

“Let him who is being saved save his soul!”

Translated by Father Deacon Seraphim Johnson, The Present Times in the Light of God’s Word: Sermons and Speeches, Vol. 1, pp. 71-77, St. Job of Pochaev Press, Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, New York

Archangel Michael triumphing over Antichrist

*Archbishop Averky (Taushev)
Preachers Institute
4/13/2016*